

THE
LEGACY OF A GOOD NAME

A SERMON

BY REV. J. F. W. WARE.



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THE LEGACY OF A GOOD NAME:

A SERMON

On the Death of

MRS. ELIZABETH LIVERMORE,

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF THE CAMBRIDGEPORT PARISH,

AUGUST 17, 1856.

BY JOHN F. W. WARE,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRINTED FOR THE FAMILY.

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MRS. ELIZABETH LIVERMORE,

Wife of Dea. Nathaniel Livermore,

DIED IN CAMBRIDGEPORT, AUGUST 9, 1856, IN THE EIGHTIETH YEAR OF
HER AGE.

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S E R M O N.

Ecclesiasticus xlv. 8, 11: "THERE BE THEM THAT HAVE LEFT A NAME
BEHIND THEM: WITH THEIR SEED SHALL REMAIN A GOOD INHERI-
TANCE."

THAT men place something like a just estimate upon the value of a good name is evident from the general desire to have the credit of it, even where there is no real effort to attain the thing itself. Of nothing is the man of lax principle more jealous than his name; on no point is the mere man of the world so sensitive as his honor. It is a high tribute, the highest tribute, to the substantial value of the thing itself, when men who seem to regard nothing else guard this so watchfully. And what is there that we can place above it? Without it, a man is nothing among his fellows. He may have titles; he may fill places of trust; he may have great ability; he may be able to command money: but he is held in no personal

estimation, if the possession of these be sullied by serious defects of character. And these sink an infamous man to a lower depth of infamy; while he who has only a good name to sustain him shall make his way against every disadvantage of position and nature, — shall stand before kings.

The best legacies left the world have been the good names of those taken out of it. Men have toiled, in all ways and in all fields, to leave something behind them, when they were gone, which should keep up their memory, and, if possible, increase their fame, with the ages. The world is filled with monuments builded by this ambition. The sculptures of Nineveh, the pyramids of Egypt, the battle-fields of both hemispheres, — as, to some extent, great labors in more worthy and beneficent fields, — have had this aim.

No man is indifferent to fame; and no man likes to feel, that, in resigning life, he is at once dropped out of the world's memory and regard. But here, as in so many other things, men mistake. The epitaph written upon a monument, the name connected with some great battle-field, the reputa-

tion a man gets through his bequests, are not the things which really benefit the individual or the race; neither keep the memory green, or give great blessing to the world: they and he soon pass out of the world's thought. After all, dazzled as men are by the outside of things, their sober judgment is generally correct. We respect the simple and the true, however we may run after and applaud the showy and the grand. Names which once filled the world with admiration and with awe, now are scarcely remembered, unless as types of what we now disapprove and despise. Their glory is faded and tarnished; while the good names that are deeply written in upon the pages of human life grow brighter and brighter with time, as man comes to appreciate the matchless worth of simple goodness, — that humble quality which outranks and outshines all greatness.

“Princes and magistrates must fall,
 And in the dust be equal made, —
 The high and mighty with the small,
 Sceptre and crown with scythe and spade.
 All heads must come to the cold tomb:
 Only the actions of the just
 Preserve in death a rich perfume,
 Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.”

See what a good name can do for a country! Cæsar and Alexander and Napoleon placed their separate countries upon the pinnacle of a certain fame. They did all that it was possible for men to do in their line for the land of their birth. Each bequeathed an empire and a name. The legacy did no good. Rome, Macedon, France, were not the better, — rather the worse. Washington lived and toiled for his native land. In war and peace, he gave her his manhood and his age, his wisdom and his strength; and he left a name, as a warrior, to stand beside that of Cæsar and Napoleon, — to stand above them. Had that been all, it would scarcely have survived these eighty years, but, like Napoleon's, already have been upon the wane. The legacy of Washington to this people was his good name; not his great deeds on bloody fields; not his far-reaching policy, his large views of national and international intercourse and law; but his good name, — his good name, which gives to these their dignity and weight with us and with mankind. It is that in which we rejoice; it is that which breathes in institutions he founded and fostered; it is that

which makes his memory a spell ; which makes men fear to touch that which he sanctioned ; which makes the eye glisten, and the pulse beat, and the heart bless him, when his name is spoken. Had he been a Napoleon ; had he been selfishly ambitious, or his name tainted by any suspicion of crime or vice or meanness or untruth, — how different our memories, our prospects ! As it is, the name he left animates us ; and, in all our troubles and divisions, it is the one name we love and reverence ; the one memory we all cling to ; the one thing which, with a just pride, we can point to, and not only challenge, but be sure of, the admiration of a world ; the one bulwark and safety of this mighty, but otherwise illy cemented, fabric.

So it is in communities. What did our Pilgrim Fathers bequeathe to us ? Not gold, or great conquests, or a brilliant career, as the world counts brilliancy ; not a name that glitters on the page of history as that of the barons of old, or the brave old dons of Spain, or the cavaliers of their own day ; not a name to be vaunted boastfully, and obtruded always by posterity as their only

and sufficient claim to place and notice and rule. No: nothing of all this, — nothing but a good name. Where will you find an inheritance like to ours? Where will you find a bequest that has so abounded with beneficence, — one which has so strongly marked, so directly blessed, a nation? Those good men, planting a winter colony by the wild sea, with no support save their faith in God; leaving behind them only the record of their toil in the principles they inculcated, and the characters they strove to form; the only material monument to their name, the eternal rock on which they first placed foot; and, for all other monument, only their good name, — have done more for the true good of the world than any set of men who have ever lived. It is the influence of their name which has given the stable element to this people; it is the character which has its root in the fissures of Plymouth Rock, sterile, wave-washed as that was, which is the real hope of a nation of thirty millions. Where, on the mad sea of discord, should we long ago have been, but for the character of our ancestry, and the power which their simple name has wielded

over the lives, the thoughts, the destiny, of this great people?

So it is in cities, towns, villages, neighborhoods, religious societies, social circles, and families. How much in each has a good name done! and what a constructive as well as conservative element has it been! What do not we all owe to the good name of some one or other who has been taken from our eyes, but has left to our memories and hearts the remembrance of a holy life, shining clearly out amid the too general selfishness and sin, giving us assurances in the triumphs of their fidelity that we, too, may triumph, when we shall have learned to be alike faithful! You may endow cities, villages, neighborhoods, and churches with every privilege wealth can buy; they may have hospitals and libraries and public gardens and vested funds; there shall be no conceivable possibility but shall be theirs; and yet they shall thrive more truly upon one good name fairly established among them — one holy memory shall say more for their past, and accomplish more for their future — than all these. If you want really to know what a town is, you ask for the character

of its men ; if you would discover the worth of a faith, you look to the lives of its professors. It is not size or repute or wealth or numbers which you make your criterion ; but the criterion is the good name of those residing or professing. It is this in which all reflecting men put their trust. A community that has nursed a Howard, an Oberlin, a Lawrence ; a neighborhood that is marked for its charities and good-will ; a church that can point to young and old, living humbly and dying peacefully, — these will stand higher in human estimation, will be more sought and more respected, than where a more brilliant name but thinly overlays the glaring inconsistencies and wants beneath.

Valuable as is a good name to all these, and direct and tangible as are the results of it to these, there is no good name of such direct value as the good name of a parent to a child. No words can express that value : it is beyond estimate or price. Only the faith and character of Christ were a greater bequest. Forgive me if I say I know it from that rich legacy it has pleased God to allow me, to which I would be neither

blind nor indifferent. As parents, we are not sufficiently sensible to the demands made upon us, that we do not clog our children with the impediment of a bad memory, but wing them on their way with the help of a good name. The world is often unjust and bitter in bringing up against the child the reproach of a parent's name. It has sometimes proved too much for him: it has dogged him and destroyed him. But, on the other hand, it is often over-liberal to him whose heritage is a good name, and overlooks and excuses faults because of the name he bears; so that the words of the Psalmist are true, — “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.” We do not think enough of this inheritance for our children. To labor that they may sit at ease, to amass that they may consume, to wear out that they may rust out, is the work of a blind and carnal affection, looking at life, and the ordainment of its disciplines and the demand of its duties, under an entirely erroneous aspect. Give your children a good education; fit them well for some definite, well-chosen, independent pursuit;

ground them thoroughly in religious principle, — and you have given them abundant furnishing for the *work* and the *want* of life. If to this you choose to add a little sum for each, as that which shall answer to fall back upon in case of any sudden emergency, well and good. But it is a mad mistake that men make when they deprive themselves of the privilege of their own exertions, the true enjoyments they might partake, the real good they might do, and see growing out of their bounty, that so they may leave “much goods” to their posterity. The actual need of a child is nothing beyond a thorough moral and religious training, — a thorough mastery of the elements of some one daily pursuit. Wealth he does not want: it is a bequest that seldom blesses any child, and has cursed many. I recall those of my own age who have inherited property; and, with a few exceptions, they are the merest ciphers in God’s creation. Finding wealth placed in their hands, the motive to honorable exertion was taken from them. Qualities which they had for blessing themselves and benefiting the world they have never called into exercise. They are mere consumers,

idly living to themselves, utterly crushed by that mistaken tenderness which sought to shield them from that rough contact with life, and that harsh struggle in it, out of which man only carves his true happiness and worth. Children deserve, and should have, some distinct, definite, valuable legacy from their parents; parents should labor distinctly and definitely to that end: but the legacy should not be the legacy of gold.

I have stood amid the rich and the honored, and bowed in reverence with them before the majesty of a good name. I have seen them gathered to pay the last tribute of respect to one whose legacy to the world, and most to his children, was, first and chiefest, his good name. I have felt what that legacy was worth, — beyond price better than the silver and gold that might have been. Some misfortune, some cunning, some freak of chance, might sweep these away at any moment; but a name about which cluster the virtues and graces of a Christian character, one which men pronounce with reverence and love, one which the child may look back upon with solemn joy, — what misfortune or cunning or chance can tarnish

or destroy that? The narrow home of poverty, the sharp pang of distress, the solitary life of orphanage, have ever a blessed solace in the precious memory of one whose holiness, going before them, sheds the sanctity of its influence upon their darkest and dreariest hour. Many a child would willingly give its gold for the inheritance of a good name; but what child would ever barter such a heritage for gold?

And, then, the child who has hereditary morality, who has seen it at home daily in a thousand familiar ways, has a less harsh and hazardous task for himself in life. In giving a child the hourly benefit of a holy life, a parent has given him that which must be an essential aid in his future career, which will make the whole of that future one of comparative ease. He has not to create a model of excellence for himself, or to search out one in the example of others: he has one ready to his hands. What he has received from you, what you are in his memory, has entered into his moral stature, as the food you supplied him with entered into his corporeal frame. He has an advantage. He has been trained, he is prepared, armed, for

this contest of life ; contest not only with external, physical obstructions, but with those internal, invisible, innumerable busy foes which are ever watching and waiting to overthrow the ignorant and timid. The voice of parental counsel, the thought of parental virtue, rising before him, stand as a shield to keep him from the evil, act as a charm to nerve him for his work, — a work whose demands are not answered when he has a daily occupation and a definite support, but only when he walks humbly and cautiously amid the temptations of his lot, remembering God, and living to him.

Yet more: what a solace to a child's heart is the good name of a parent! There is comfort in the assurances of faith ; there is much to sustain and bless in the promises and the help of the Holy Spirit. Never are we comfortless ; and yet how bitter the agony, which the truest faith cannot efface, of him who has to mourn the memory of parental unworthiness ! — an agony which he does not know whose grief is cheered by the thought of a father's or mother's good name. That thought comes in the moments of the sharpest

sorrow, and when the sense of loss is keen, as a rest and a refreshing. I have heard one in the first hours of separation say how precious to him the legacy of his mother's character; how much he owed to her early training of his infant mind; that nothing she could have left him could compare in value with her good name. It was an influence in his life; it was a comfort at the parting, a support under the affliction. What reputation won upon the world's arena, what name glittering on the page of human renown, could give all that?

He who has looked about him, and knows what this life which men lead is, and how full of all manner of evil it is, and how hard for the young to tread in its pathways securely; who has seen how young hopes and prospects have suffered because of the ill that had been in the lives of the parents, — understands how much of blessing and help there is in the legacy a good man bequeathes to his child in his character; how the sense of it swells and strengthens within him; how it is courage and wisdom and hope to him; how it gives him at once that which every man needs,

which many men vainly seek for,—a near and dear and known image of virtue, one whose daily life was visible, and who showed in that how by it and its little gains the vast height of moral excellence was to be reached. He who can remember the life of such father, or dwell on that of such mother, has before him the secret of this holy life which many men never discover; and he has added to every other inducement that of filial affection. The reverence of the child for the character of an earthly parent has helped many to love the character of the Father in heaven.

Certainly these are inducements for a man to bend himself with energy to the acquisition of a truly good name, if he be unwilling to do so from any higher motive. His gold may perish; it may never reach those for whom it is so hardly earned; it may be their curse. His good character can never perish; it can never be diverted, nor curse. Most of you are toiling in the world, laying up of its stores, very diligent in its duties, and hope to leave your children out of the reach of want. Are not too many of you, at the same time, careless of your own characters, negligent of holy things, and

regardless of the consequences upon the future memory and welfare of your children? Even now they note these defects in character, and are affected by them; become themselves careless; and what they see their parents have placed little value on, that they value little. By and by, amid the experience and discipline of life, these things will come up more vividly. Every child, at some time, sits in judgment upon parental character. Filial love may be deep, and yet not blind. If you would be honored by your child; if you would hope that his early love might receive the sanction of his maturer judgment; if you would live in his memory, when yourselves are gone, a dear and bright and helping image, — have a regard to the character by which your child knows you. Give most time, most care, most anxiety, to that; so that it may descend to your posterity with usury. You may think that you leave your children nothing, unless you leave them gold. I tell you, you leave them nothing, unless you leave them character, — that good name which the writer of the Proverbs says is rather to be chosen than great riches.

I cannot let the sabbath pass without a brief allusion to one of our own number just passed, leaving to the community, to the church, to her family, the legacy of a good name. I find, far back in the Church Records, her name subscribed to the platform of this church, of which, for so many years, she has been an humble and consistent, as well as the oldest female, member. For more than half a century, she had been faithful in the discharge of her duties as wife and mother and neighbor. A kind heart, a ready sympathy, a willing charity, — a charity not of deeds alone, but of feeling and words, — a quiet but deep interest in those she knew and the church she loved, were characteristics which must have struck all who at all knew her; while a certain reserve and dignity of manner may have kept some from realizing how warm and large was the heart that beat beneath. In the sacred sphere of home — the quiet but vast sphere which God has ordained for woman — it was that she truly showed her worth; and it is that sphere into which we, who are without, may not intrude, save with our silent sympathy and prayers. In a good old age, ere the most

selfish could have said she had outlived her usefulness, the silver cord is loosed, and she has willingly followed whither her Father led; leaving the mantle of her good name, the legacy rather to be chosen than riches, to all who knew her. While many an one who has occupied a larger sphere shall be forgot, still shall her influence be felt, passing to children's children, blessing them even who have never known her; for the same death that cannot touch the soul has no power over any human good. To her, as to all who leave behind them a fragrant memory, we owe a debt; a debt only to be discharged by so doing, in our own lives, that in the end we too shall leave the legacy of a good name behind us, — the heritage better than the heritage of gold.

